Sylvandale School

By Rebecca Nielsen

The following article describes the architecture of schools in Clatsop County's rural districts, with an emphasis on Sylvandale School.

Sylvandale School (Blind Slough School) lies twenty miles east of Astoria and two and one-half miles north of Highway 30 at the end of Sylvandale Road (formerly Davis Bottom Road). The area, known as lower Brownsmead, is on the way to Aldrich Point, the northern most point in Oregon. The school lies on flattened out area of a south sloping hill.

In my mother's backyard, tucked up against a hillside of tall second growth fir trees overlooking the valley, sits an empty one-room schoolhouse. Though awkward additions jut from several sides, much of its historic fabric remains. The century old wood is still strong. A few of its last students still gather in the schoolyard every few years on a summer afternoon. Their interest caught my interest and I began to gather information on the Sylvandale School building, one of the last extant one-room schoolhouses in Clatsop County, to record its history and to compare the building's architecture with other rural Clatsop County schools of its type and time period.

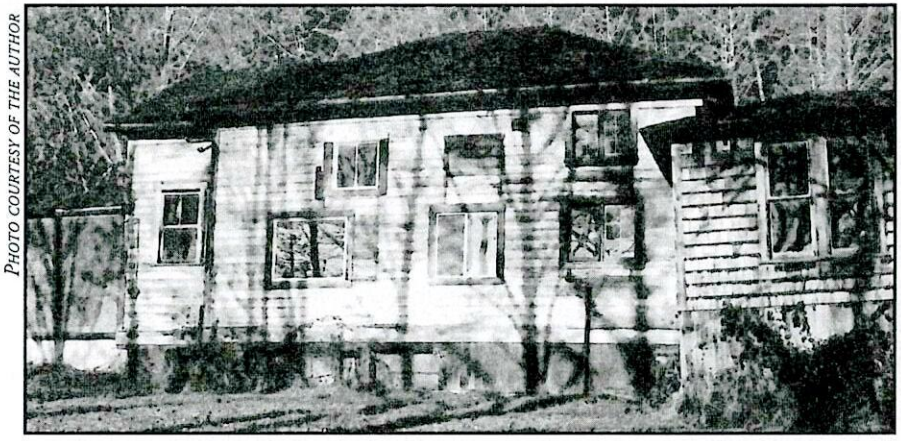

Photo courtesy of the author

Sylvandale School today

Rural Clatsop County Schools

The first public school in Oregon was in 1849. (Before that there was one subscription school and a mission school in 1834). The legislature of Oregon Territory in 1849 set up a system for common schools but progress was slow due to distances between families, lack of teachers, no money, and indifference. In 1872 the first superintendent was established and he set up teacher certification as well as uniform textbooks and courses.

By the mid 1870s there were 750 school districts in the state and 26,000 pupils attending public schools, and an estimated 10,000 kids not attending. Attendance was sporadic at best, according to superintendents. The 750 school districts employed 1,314 teachers. Schools were in session about one-third of the year. In the state, teacher salaries were low and training opportunities scant so most teachers came from out of state to take advantage of the land available through Oregon land claims.

Though there was controversy throughout most of the state about public and private schools, Astoria, Clatsop Country's largest city, supported public school from the beginning. Some scholars attribute this to its population coming from the northern and western states. Others note the strong immigrant population from Scandinavia who was supportive of public education. It is well documented that the Finnish volunteers helped build Taylor school in Astoria's Uniontown in the early 1900s.

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Taylor School, Astoria

In 1874–76 the population of Astoria nearly doubled. An 1873 newspaper article called Astoria schools "well supplied," continuing that "we doubt if any common school in Oregon is better supplied." This rosy report is in direct contradiction with quotes from the first Oregon school Superintendent Sylvester Simpson who in 1874 said the "...condition of the schoolhouse is bad. Schoolhouses are of inferior construction and built upon the most barren and unsightly spot in the neighborhood. Some of our schoolhouses are so dilapidated and befouled with obscene pictures and words that they are hardly fit for decent people to enter."

The area's growing population was a strong factor in the growth of area schools from 1885 to 1900. With the great influx of population in 1875, there was more money from the state and county for schools. In 1890 there

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SHIVELY SCHOOL ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF EXCHANGE STREET, EAST OF 16TH STREET IN ASTORIA. CA 1883

were only eight cities in the state with a population over 2,500 and one was Astoria. By 1900 the school population in Astoria was one hundred times bigger than it was fifty years earlier. Astoria city boundaries were also changed around that time.

The small rural communities surrounding Astoria may have received some of the bounties from the increased county and state revenues. Add to that the Oregon Blue Book statistics of Oregon's incredible lumber industry. The state harbored one-fifth the nation's total supply of harvestable timber in 1909: 400 billion board feet. This brought in lots of wood workers, and lots of carpenters and they built lots of wood schools.

The Superintendent of Schools makes an accounting of the school system in a December 24, 1901 front-page article in *The Daily Astorian*. He lists forty-four schools in the county, five of which are in Astoria. The remaining thirty-nine are rural one-room schools. Twelve of these are temporary structures. Five are under construction. Superintendent Lyman lists which are older buildings in need of repair and which schools are new and in good condition.

In Clatsop County, the majority of the county one-room rural schoolhouses were built, from 1885 to 1900. A few more were built after 1915. Records are difficult to follow at times as conflicting opening, construction and district establishment dates are recorded. Some locations held several different buildings over time, and some schools had the same name but different district numbers. In many cases the schools were only a few miles apart and had been consolidated many years ago. Many of these buildings were still in use almost a half century later. (According to a 1940 study on the adequacy of schoolhouses in Oregon, 155 rural schools still in use were built during 1895 to 1904. These turn of the century schools made up eleven percent of the total schools in use in 1940. 15% had foundations of wood, 45.7% had concrete foundations, 91.2% had wood shingles on the roof and 11.3% had a partial basement, 19.6% had a full basement. 56% had one classroom and 24.8% were two-room.)

Lack of funds and the Depression probably contributed to the continued usage of these buildings. The concrete foundations being the most common changes.

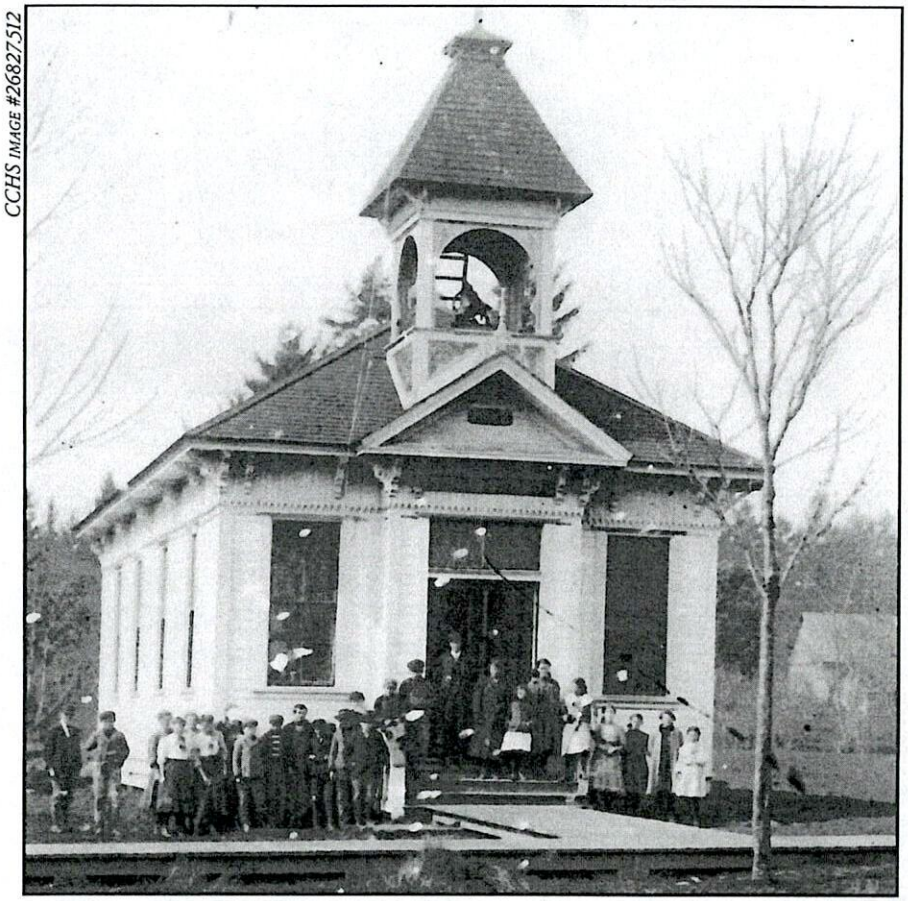
The following is a brief architectural description of some rural schools built around the turn of the century. Population statistics are from 1910. Historical photographs show a high degree of similarity in these buildings from 1880 to 1900. The schools below roughly follow the plan of a large rectangle with front vestibule and, in many cases, a steeple.

Warrenton: This school opened in 1892. The busy port town had two sawmills. The 1892 Warrenton school is more elaborately decorated than many of the smaller schools. The center projection has double doors and a transom, flanked by four-over -four double hung windows. It has Italianate detailing with a decorative frieze, highly decorated double knee braces supporting a wide cornice. It has a front pediment and hipped roof and four window openings.

Hammond: Reported opening dates for the school vary by thirty years at this community, from 1869 to 1897. With a population of 500 it was 20% bigger than Knappa. The 1883 Hammond school had a decorative frieze, three window openings, a front projection, a transom, and a pediment.

Hamlet was a small Finnish community located twenty miles east of Seaside. The population was eighty in 1910. The school opened about 1898. A 1908 photograph documents a front gabled building "built of hand-split cedar like all the homes and outbuildings," according to teacher Miss Mary Holst. The white school was the only painted building in the community. It operated from March through October. Like many of these buildings, it is similar to board and batten early gothic revival churches, but uses horizontal siding — a Scandinavian house trait.

Westport, a community to the east of Blind Slough, had an early school dating between 1861–63. It was of



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WARRENTON SCHOOL ON ALDER AVENUE WAS LOCATED ABOUT A BLOCK WEST OF WHERE THE U.S. POST OFFICE IS TODAY.

board and batten construction on the sides with three window openings and horizontal siding on the front hip-roof full width porch and gable.

Elsie School opened in 1892–94. An existing photograph shows a school with Craftsman features, a small front porch under the gable, at least six windows on the side, knee braces and exposed rafter tails on the roof.

Mountain View: A small undated photograph shows a three bay, front gabled structure with a full width hip-roof porch in a barren landscape.

Jewell School, established in 1872 was the only photographically documented log structure.

Knappa: A busy community with a population of 400, Knappa had several hotels and a store. Knappa School was founded in 1855, listed

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UNIDENTIFIED SCHOOL. IF YOU CAN IDENTIFY THE SCHOOLS OR STUDENTS IN THIS SERIES OF IMAGES, PLEASE CONTACT US.

as opening in 1872. Knappa has had four different schools. The earliest documented is the Knappa Black School in 1855, an unpainted simple board and batten building with three window openings, six-over-six

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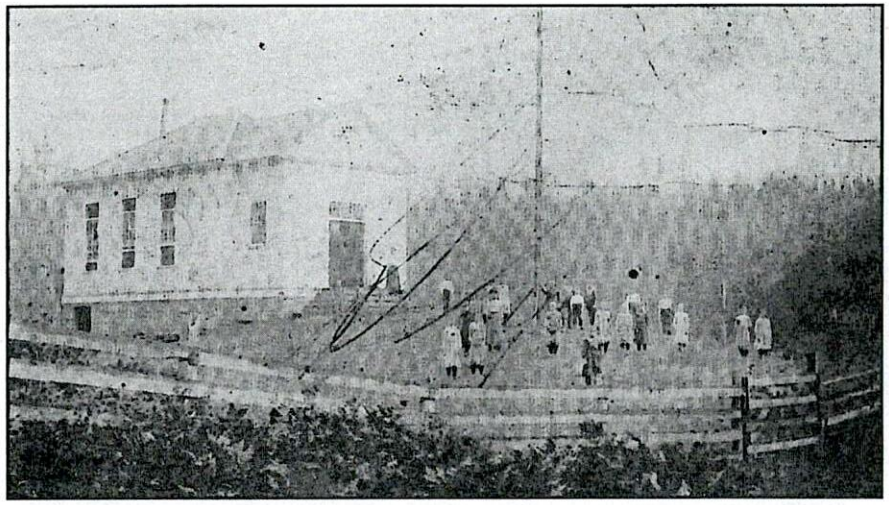


IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

SYLVANDALE SCHOOL BEFORE THE FULL-WIDTH PORCH WAS ADDED. CA. 1909

windows and a gable front. This was abandoned when the Knappa White School was built in 1878. (The Black School still existed in the 1970s.) This school had three window openings, a front gable with a hipped porch, six-over-six double hung windows, horizontal siding, and a half-enclosed porch with the upper half in lattice. It appears to have had a rear shed roof addition by 1910 or 1912.

The White School was torn down when Fairview School, a two-room school (later converted to four rooms) was built in the early 1900s. I was in the first grade at this school, its last year of operation in 1966. It was torn down soon afterward. The fourth school for Knappa District #4 is still used today. It is of modern construction and named after a student of Sylvandale School.

Knappa School is a good example of the progression of country schools from folk style (made with local materials and ethnic characteristics) to mass vernacular (using machine-made commercially sold materials) and then to a standardized plan (using stock materials).

Svensen: With a population of one hundred (many of whom were loggers) and its own sawmill, Svensen established its school in 1895. It had three banks of windows, a hipped roof with center vestibule, double doors with transom, and a pediment with a lunette vent in the gable. The main difference with the Sylvandale School, built a few years later, is the addition of a steeple on top the Svensen school. There is also a shed roof extension on the back and the gable is shingled. Windows do not appear to have ears but have aprons. Another school photo labeled as "Svenson" by the

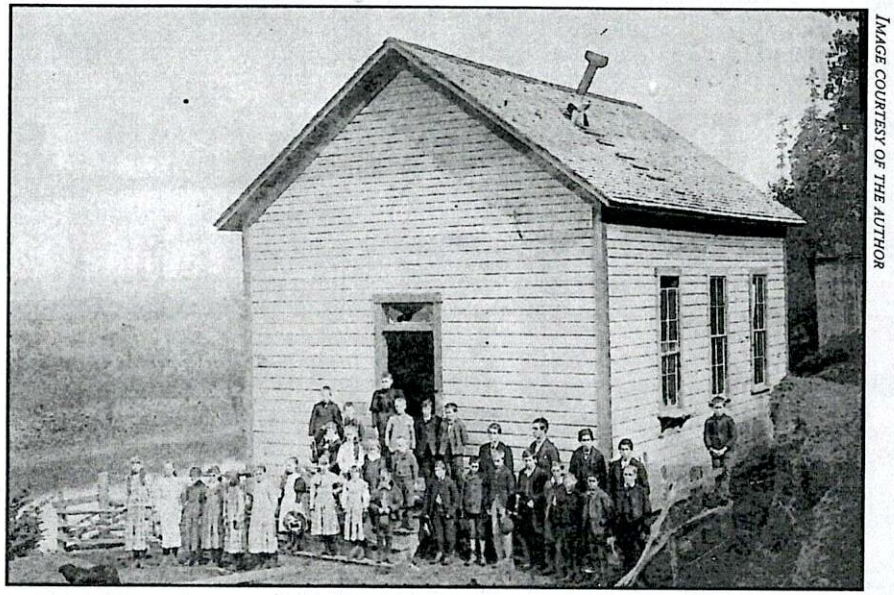
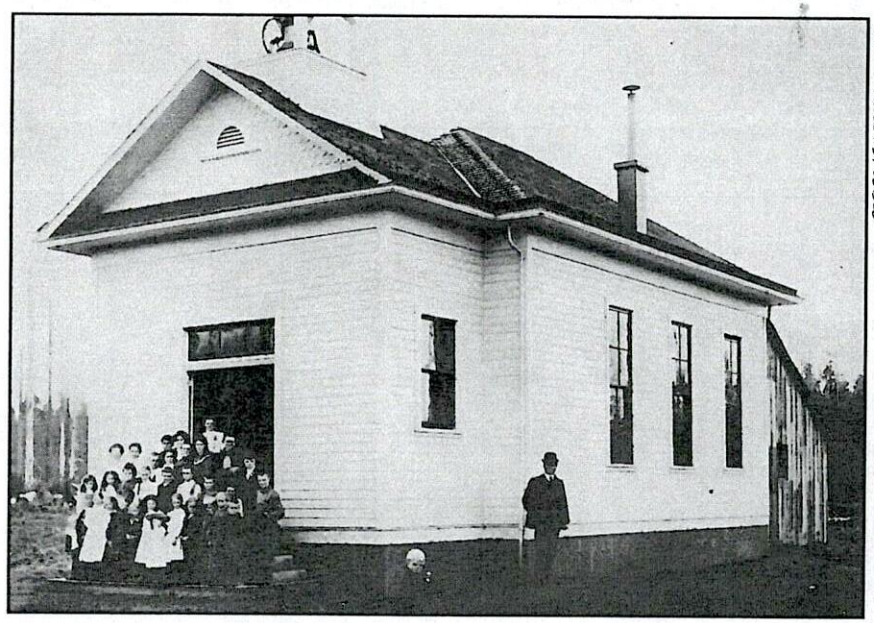


IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

BLIND SLOUGH SCHOOL



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DISTRICT 4 SCHOOL, ON A HILL IN LOWER KNAPPA NEAR THE RAIL ROAD.

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Unidentified school. The sign proudly reads, "Our Country's Flag."

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Clatsop School. 1908. The teacher was Maude Turlay.

Oregon Historical Society shows a similar building with decorated eve brackets.

Brownsmead-area schools: The first school in the area was Upper Blind Slough School District #23, established in 1887 for the children of Albert and Blind Slough communities (the area now known as Brownsmead). The first Upper Blind Slough School was set alongside the slough which ran from the Columbia River at Aldrich Point, the northernmost point in Oregon, through the lowlands of Albert, a swampy island. Many students arrived by boat.

A few miles away and a few years later, the Lower Blind Slough School District #9 (earlier referred to as Sylvandale School) began in the home of Henry (Ed.) Willman (two acres west of the extant schoolhouse). Classes were moved to the Sylvandale School when it was built around the turn of the century. In 1927 Upper Blind Slough District #23 students were consolidated with the Sylvandale School.

The original Upper Blind Slough School District #23, established in 1887, was a gabled roof building with three window openings. On the gable end was a hip roof vestibule with a single door and double hung windows. There is no trace of this school today. An 1895 newspaper article lists twenty-seven enrolled students who were taught for a total of ninety -nine days.

Sylvandale School was in an area known as Albert in 1910, population 250. Many settlers were Finnish and Swedish immigrants. Albert had a post office in Albert Borglund's home in 1901 (Sarkie, 1976). In 1910 the new post office opened by the railroad at Blind Slough. Albert had a shipping station, a sawmill, and lots of loggers. Big events started happening for this rural community from 1914 to 1918. The island was diked in 1914. The hub of activity for the area changed to the railway station stop where the new Farmer's Club was built, and the name of this hub became Brownsmead. For a short time before, it was known as Brody — a railway switching station. A Brownsmead School (district #39) was established in 1917. This was a two-room school. Traces of the school remain today just a few miles from Sylvandale School.

Other: A photo labeled as unknown Clatsop County school has four-over-four double hung windows, a steeple, a front projection, and a hipped roof.

A picture of an early Astoria urban school circa 1860 shows a four bay, front gabled building with eve returns, a transom over the door, and six-over-six double hung windows. Generally the town schools were larger and more formal.

Other rural schools in the area built between 1890 and 1900 include: Clifton in 1893, Fernhill in 1880 or 1901, Gearhart in 1898, Olney in 1875, Seaside in 1873, Vesper in 1882,Vinemaple in 1878 or 1891, Walluski in 1899, Necanicum in 1894, Ecola in 1895, and Wauna in 1896.

Other one-room school houses in Oregon at the time varied from primitive and unpainted to more finished, but with similar structure.

Rural one-room schoolhouses in the West

Schoolhouses in the West followed much the same development pattern as farmhouses. First a primitive structure was built. On the frontier in the mid-1800s schools were built similar to the home and farm buildings. They had no particular style. Resources were scarce. When a second more permanent structure could be built the primitive structures were demolished.

By the 1870s small frame schoolhouses began to replace the simpler earlier structures. At this time schools began to be painted. Before 1870 they were left unpainted because of the expense. When they were painted they were usually not "the little red schoolhouse" of our collective nostalgia, but white. In 1917 the recommended paint was "pure ground white lead."

According to one 1915 source, a common one-room schoolhouse was "an ordinary box-shaped building without architecture, without a plan, and as a rule, without care or repair... the contract for building it was usually awarded to some carpenter who was also given carte blanche to do as he pleased in regard to its construction, the only provision be in that he keep within the amount of money allowed — probably eight hundred or a thousand dollars. The usual result was the plainest kind of building, without

Image courtesy of the author

The new Brownsmead School, ca. 1925, was located on Rudat Road

conveniences of any kind."

That fact that many schoolhouses were roughly cobbled together did not keep architects and sociologists from waxing eloquently on what form schools should take. "No school building should be erected that has not first been planned or passed upon by an architect; this is now required by law in some states — a building with handsome appearance with appropriate appointments... There should be a flagpole in front of the schoolhouse, from the top of which the stars and stripes should be often unfurled to the breeze."

A few plan books included school designs and recommendations. In 1848 Henry Barnard's plans required buildings with high ceilings. He also recommended that windows "be placed on only two sides of the room, at least three and one-half to four feet above the floor, and that they not be directly behind the teacher." William Alcott won a prize for an essay on the design of schoolhouses in 1831. He favored large windows above eye level for reducing distraction and the Greek Revival style.

Though in 1859 James Johonnot said Greek and Gothic were too much for country schoolhouses, these became popular styles. He cautioned that steep Gothic roofs might wear out sooner than lower-pitched roofs. Many styles were present in schoolhouse design but usually were reduced and simplified to vernacular forms.

By the 1880s and 1890s in the West it was common to find a schoolhouse with a front entrance, a brick chimney or stovepipe, banks of three windows (commonly nine-over-nine), and window shutters. At times a vestibule, cloakroom or porch was added. There is some discrepancy about the orientation of the building. Early writing favors northern light and facing the long side of the structure north to catch this best. Others have the front portal facing south (or sometimes east which would accommodate a long north side.) Some research indicates northern light as the best so the long side should face north, others have the front portal facing south (or east). Two story schools were extremely rare west of the Mississippi. This fact is born out by statistics of an Oregon study reporting 93.9% of the state's schoolhouses were one story.

Schools at this time were balloon framed with horizontal siding. Shingles and shakes were the most common for roofs, especially in the West where wood was plentiful. Nice privies arrived around 1900. Bell towers were added by 1910.

To a certain extent, the design of the one room schoolhouse was limited to the size a single teacher could manage. Everyone needed to be within the earshot and eyesight of the teacher. The maximum size of rooms was thirty to forty feet. Other common dimensions were: 25'×32', 24'×36', 20'×30' and 18'×32'.

The decline of one-room schoolhouses in the 20th century

Perhaps these tidy examples of rural architecture are partly responsible for the state's and the county's high academic standing. In a 1921 comparative ranking of the counties in the order of their efficiency, Clatsop placed fourth out of thirty-six. Oregon ranked thirteenth nationally in 1890, twenty-eigth in 1900, fifteenth in 1910 and twentieth in 1918. This was probably the heyday of one-room schools.

In 1910 already forty-six percent of Americans lived in cities, compared to five per cent of the whole population being urban in 1810. Ten years later schools were standardizing, modernizing and growing. There was still need for the one-room schoolhouse for a while.

There was a steady decrease in Oregon one-room schools from 1922 to 1928; approximately thirty-four per year. A 1928 study showed 1,495 still operating in Oregon during the school year 1927–28. The average length of the school term was 8.65 months. Total number of pupils in average daily attendance was 18,531 with an average of 12.4 students per teacher. By comparison, there were 590 mostly urban elementary schools with two or more teachers. Still, 72% of schools were one-room schools. Median salary paid to teachers of one-room schools in 1927–28 was lower than what was paid in 1920–21, approximately $103. A teacher's monthly salary ranged from $75 to $185.

This study details some of the factors that led to the demise of the one room schoolhouse. With only a few students, country schools cost more per capita to operate than their city counterparts. "The study of pupil costs shows that the small one-room school of the rural district is decidedly at a disadvantage financially if compared to the urban school. The only remedy possible at the present time is to increase the size of the unit of the rural district by even more extensive consolidation, thereby increasing pupil enrollment, and bringing about reorganization." This is exactly what happened to Clatsop County in the next decade following the study.

Day to Day in rural Clatsop County schools

School board meeting minutes for District #9 (Sylvandale) do not appear to exist. However notes on other schools in the area give an idea on how a few things were run. School Board meetings for the Astoria District #1, the biggest school board in the county, do exist from the late 1890s. These notes tell of collecting bids for 100 cords or more of firewood to heat the schools. (The winning bid was $3.35 per cord by the HB Borthwick Lumber Co.). They decided to open school the last Monday in September 1899. They got bids for painting the buildings and a request for more blackboards. There are several inci-

dents of misconduct of boys, some vandalism and some boys ringing bells to the annoyance of neighbors. The Principal of Alderbrook School was authorized to have someone put up the one hundred cords of wood at $1 per cord. There was motion to have the curtains turned end for end and the architect J. E. Ferguson was contacted about placing weights in windows. These notes indicate to me that the schools were probably not community built and were put to bid by carpenters and architects as other more minor services appear to have been handled this way. Rarely did school board members plan ahead and stock the wood pile.

According to a Brownsmead school student Tim DeJong's memoir, an Astoria architect drew up the plans for the two-room Brownsmead School in 1917. It was contracted to Ostrom and Mart. A small house was used as a temporary school in 1916. Twenty children of all ages walked a mile on the railroad track. They carried the first graders and others too small to walk. The teacher, Miss McDonald boarded with a nearby family. It was a half-year of schooling.

Tim DeJong remembers the new school in 1917–18. His father was the chairman of the school board. He was hired by the board to clean the blackboards, sweep the floors, bring in the firewood for the pot-bellied stove and light the fire before school started each day. It paid $3 per month."

A few Sylvandale students are still around and willing to tell tales. Born in 1915, Robert Blair was a pupil at Blind Slough School as was his mother, Hilda Takkalo born in 1893 who was in the first graduating class of the school. Blair graduated from eighth grade in 1928 at the age of twelve. He remembers an accelerated learning experience.

"I went the last six weeks of school when I was five years old. I walked with Clarence to school; they kind of used him as a baby sitter. The next year, I came to start in first grade and they said, you've already done this. So I started in second grade and then I skipped third the next year. You could skip grades," he explains, "because you heard the whole curriculum with each class reciting their lessons orally. You could take in the whole thing and move as fast as you wanted."

The boy he remembers looking after him was Clarence Knapp and his friend Sharkie Westerholm. They were about in the sixth grade. Robert lived a mile away and had to walk with the big boys when he was little.

Thinking back across sixty years his memory plays back the highlights of a twelve year old boy's school memories. The hazelnut bush in the schoolyard corner and a cache of mushrooms were good sources of "ammo." The chinning bar consisted of a couple of posts and a pipe. On frosty mornings you could get a good slide on the wooden boardwalk that ran along the north and east sides of the school. There was an annual field trip; a hike to Clatsop Crest, now called Bradley Hill. It was a tradition, he says, at least the two or three years he was at the school.

And then there was the baseball field with the yellow jacket nest near home plate. The baseball field was on the east side of the school. A screen as high as the roof protected the school windows. First base was by the woodshed. Second base by the boys privy, and home plate was next to the school.

"Kate Tolonen, the teacher, came out and played ball with us. There was a depression on the field where water collected and it was often a mud hole." Chuckling slightly, Blair remembers the teacher being caught between second and third base. The enthusiastic student tagged her out while running, accidentally knocking her in that mud hole. The result was an extra long lunch hour while she went home to change. (She lived across two fields at Willman's place.) Robert doesn't remember girls playing baseball, but then there were no girls in his class; they were either older or younger.

Miss Keene was another teacher Blair recalls. "She was a permanent teacher for many years. She told her girls she would disown them if any of them married a logger. She was an old maid."

As far as classes go, Blair remembers the cloakroom had two doors. They were not segregated for girls and boys, just two doors. Entering by the left (north) door you would see the stove. It was a round stove like an oil drum, with a hood around it, and he remembers it looking very big. The right side (or south side) of the room had the library and teacher's desk. The student desks were single, not double desks in the photograph from earlier years. He remembers a dipper and water bucket in the cloakroom, and someone having water duty, but can't remember where the spring was.

Originally, he says, there was an opening in the basement on the east side with no door or window. There was a wood floor in the basement and they used to play baseball there on bad weather days. They might have once stored wood there he thinks. "The beams looked huge to me."

His only other memories of the building and site are a fence and a gate around the school and a date painted in the panel above the porch.

There were about twenty-four to twenty-five kids in the student body. There was a Luoto in every class, he remembers. There were sixteen children, of which four didn't survive. There was a Luoto kid spanning his Mom's class all the way to his class. One of these children grew up to be Hilda Lahti, a teacher, principal, and finally superintendent of Knappa School. The current school is named after her.

Several sources credit Kate Tolonen as the one who first called Blind Slough School Sylvandale School. Blair notes, however, that his mother, who attended the school twenty years before Tolonen taught, always referred to the school as Sylvandale.

Alice Oja Nielsen was too young to go to the school just across her yard but it didn't stop her. Her brother Owen often used the school bell as his alarm clock and rushed sleepily up the hill for class. Little Alice, to his mortification, would often slip quietly into the room wearing her rubber boots decorated with yellow duckies and squeeze next to him at his desk. The teacher would ask her to leave but she stubbornly refused.

Alice also remembers Hank Lumijarvi getting $2 to $3 a month to bring in the kids from Upper Blind Slough to Sylvandale in his large, square Studebaker. She was told by her mother, Esther Oja (one time District #9 clerk) that the cast iron furnace and firebox in the Oja home came from the school in 1939 when it was no longer used as a school. Mrs. Willman, who was responsible for going to the school early to build a fire in the 1930s, showed Alice's mom Esther how to build the fire.

Frank Frost remembers starting school at Sylvandale in 1932. In his memoir he writes of being the lone first grader along with Arthur Jakkola, the lone second grader. Arthur spoke mostly Finnish so Frank was promoted to second grade to be a study partner. Frost remembers three teachers over his five years at Sylvandale with student bodies ranging from nine to sixteen students.

Like Blair he remembers the baseball diamond and adds that the pitcher's mound was on the lowest point. But baseball wasn't the favorite game for his class. They enjoyed playing in the surrounding woods. When the rains hit and baseball field became a pond which provided lots of opportunities including a game called "Duck on the Rock." Drier games took place in the small barn behind the school and under the classroom in the "cubbyhole," and the wood storage and furnace area. He remembers the one-room building being lit with only the windows. Outhouses were placed at the edge of the school grounds.

Historic photographs document field trips, play with masks, black-face productions, Mayday activities.

SYLVANDALE SCHOOL
CA. 1900

Sylvandale School takes a page out of Henry Barnard's 1838 School Architecture book that says a school "should overlook a delightful country, present a choice of sunshine and shade or trees and flowers, and be sheltered from the prevailing winds of winter by a hill-top." But it also is a typical example of a country school based on a plan book design with some regional vernacular building traditions. A typical school in mass vernacular has dimension lumber, commercial siding, standard doors and casings, manufactured hardware and fittings such as doorknobs, ventilating louvers and belles. It looks like other civic structures and may have ornamental details or additions such as a portico, dormer, or bell. This describes Sylvandale.

Sylvandale also fits the description of standard interiors with tongue and groove flooring and wainscoting. It does not have the embossed metal ceilings but a lovely curved bead board ceiling. Standard plans called for ceilings were at least fifteen feet and wainscoting ran four and one-half feet up from the floor or just below the windows. Windows were generally simple without decorative mill work. Instead of the standard hood molds for exterior windows, Sylvandale features decorative ears. Though the teacher's desk sat on a platform stage in many early twentieth century schools, there is no evidence that was the case here.

The original furnishings are not extant so these can not be compared. Accoutrements for the era would have included cast-iron desks, cabinets, shelving, slate blackboards, and a pot bellied stove on cast iron legs. Many had a cloakroom for wraps, hooks or nails were placed three to four feet off the ground and a shelf above the hooks. Few schools had flags until after 1900. Sylvandale's opening day photo includes a flag and a tall flag pole in front of the school. Later that flagpole is moved to the front gable of the school. Historic photographs show curtains and many photographs on the wall, and decorations of birch boughs. This could be a following a Scandinavian midsummer tradition.

State laws unifying school conditions began in the 1920s. However, sometimes county superintendents supplied floor plans as is the case in Massachusetts where frame schools were nearly identical as they followed county plans.

Though the time period for the Greek Revival style in Oregon is much earlier, approximately 1850–1860, the schoolhouse exhibits some simplified vernacular elements of this style. It has all of the Greek Revival style features as identified in *Field Guide for American Houses*. These include: a low pitched hipped roof, cornice line of main roof and porch emphasized with wide band of trim representing classical entablature, a traditional classical pediment above the entry porch, a front door with transom above, and elaborate door and window surrounds.

Greek Revival was established as a good school plan. It was very common in the Willamette Valley in 1860, in fact the schoolhouse windows are identical to the windows in the now-demolished Cartwright Inn of Lorraine built in the mid 1800s. The style was spread by pattern books and

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

SYLVANDALE STUDENTS. CA. 1920

was used in "houses, churches and shops of extremely modest dimensions, usually in a basic interpretation of the Greek Revival style." There is another vernacular Greek Revival home built in 1903 approximately two miles from the school.

Another explanation for the classic detailing lies in the Finnish makeup of the community. There are no records on who built the school. The community and students were mostly of Finnish descent. Many students spoke Finnish at home and learned English at school. It is also documented the majority of Finnish immigrants came from the Ostrobothnia area of western Finland. The area has a strong tradition of vernacular architecture with classic detailing. The half-arch "sun" motif in the pediment is also typical to the Ostrobothnia area. The pattern of the school is a simplified version of the original Finn Hall in Astoria and also similar to Svensen School circa 1895 (now a residence). The coved ceilings on the interior are typical of the "cave" of wood favored by the churches in the Oulu area of Finland. The other two Brownsmead schools (Blind Slough #23 from the 1880–90 and Brownsmead circa 1917) were simple gable roof structures and architecturally much less interesting and elaborate.

HISTORY OF PROPERTY

CHRONOLOGY OF CHANGES

Unlike most historians who follow the people connected with a building, my interest lies mainly in the building itself; its construction and form. Clues to its changes and original shape can be found in the building itself and in historical records and photographs. I have pieced together the following time line.

1869: The land on which the school stands was purchased in Oregon City by John Davis, a single man on May 15, 1869. The purchase was for eighty acres and purchased from President U.S. Grant and was recorded April 8, 1872.

1898: The Blind Slough School District #9 was established. School registry books record two receipts for

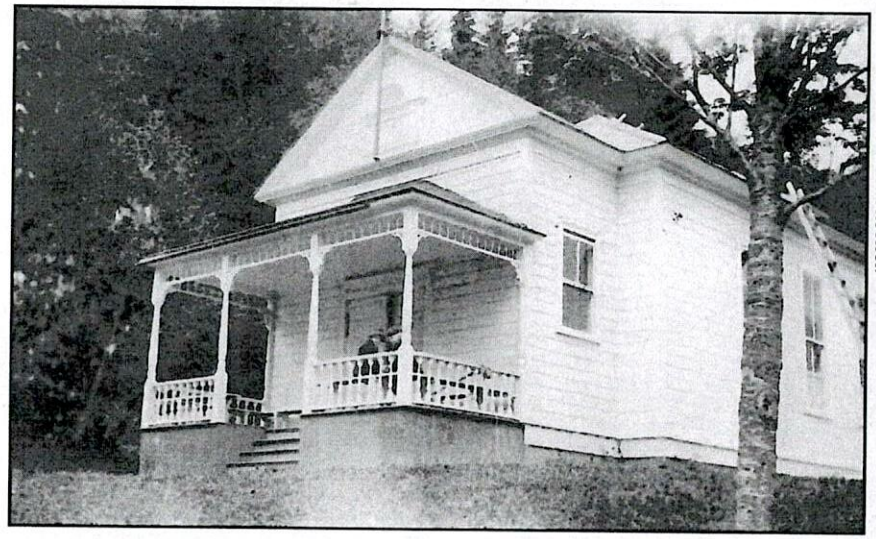

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

SYLVANDALE SCHOOL AFTER THE PORCH WAS ADDED.

District #9 in April. One receipt is for $50 and one for $150. These are probably for the land and/or materials for building the school. The deed giving over one acre of land and granting road access from John Davis was recorded in October.

1899–1901: I place Sylvandale School construction between 1899–1901. School Superintendent Lyman listed Blind

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

MAY DAY ACTIVITIES AT SYLVANDALE SCHOOL.

Image courtesy of the author

Students at Sylvandale School ca. 1913

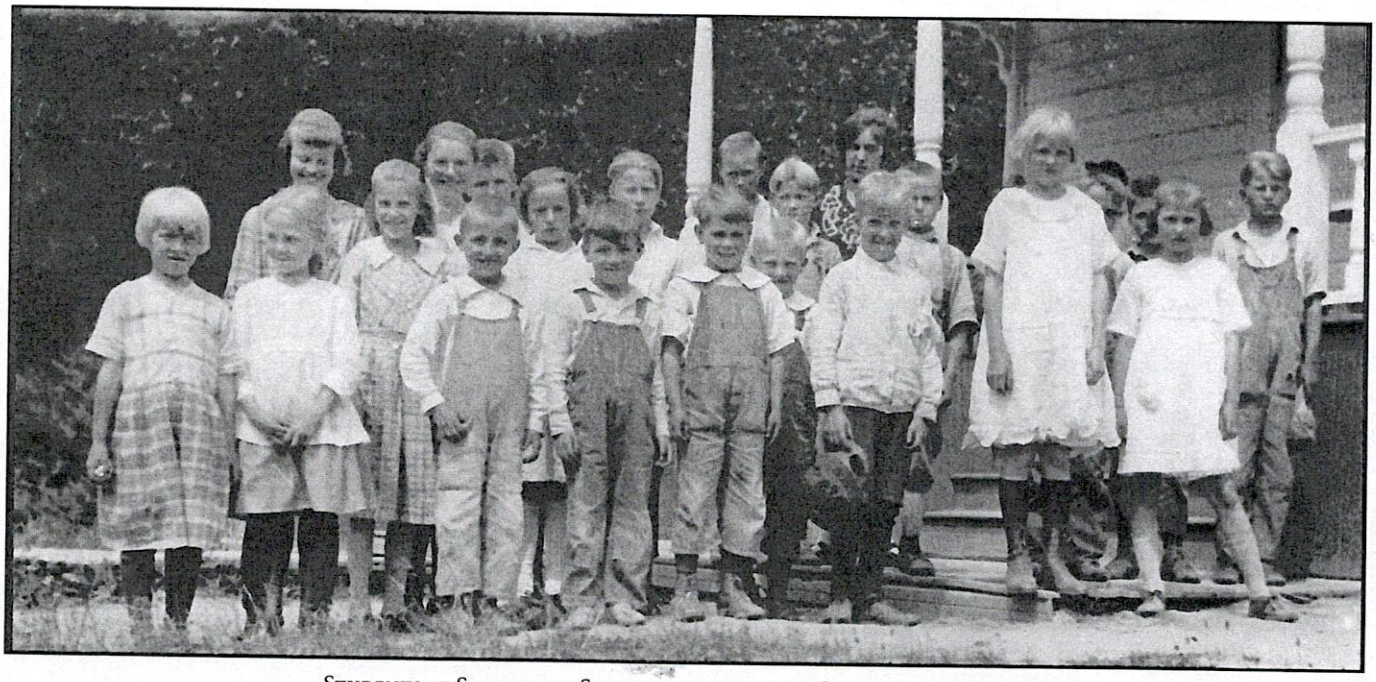

Image courtesy of the author

Students at Sylvandale School with teacher, Stella Empo. ca. 1924.

Image courtesy of the author

Sylvandale students on a long hike along the new highway 30 to Clatsop Crest. ca. 1920

Slough District #9 as up and running in A-One condition in a December 24, 1901 newspaper article. The school year, at that time, ran from February to October. Building and opening of the school occurred sometime during these years. County school records show one one-room school was built each of these years (1899, 1900, and 1901) but does not designate where. An original photo of what is believed to be opening day shows no porch, a chimney on the north side, a flag pole, and no hawthorn tree. It shows land sloping down to the east with an entry in the foundation to a basement on the east end. The photograph includes a woodshed outbuilding to the northeast of the school.

1903: County records show three teachers living in Albert. Records also note which of the districts in the county are employing two teachers and having two-room schoolhouses. The Blind Slough Schools (Districts #9 & #23) are not listed among these. Each of these schools should have one teacher.

1909–1911: A carpenter Gothic full-width porch is added on over the entrance doors under the gable. The date of the porch is estimated from the known age of several of the students in the photo. Student Oney Oja (my grandfather) born in 1902 appears to be about seven to nine years old standing on the porch. (Note the bare feet of most children in the early pictures would indicate summertime classes.) Classes were held in summer only because of severe flooding over Davis Bottom occurring during the high tide and the rainy season. There was no tide gate then and Blind Slough would come up into the low valley. Albert Island was not yet diked.

Another clue to the date of the porch rests in the direction of the foundation siding and the amount of vegetation on the porch. A picture labeled 1911 shows vegetation on the north side and a sloping hillside. Another early photo shows a foundation of horizontal siding. A third photo with the porch in place with vegetation growing on it shows the foundation skirting has vertical siding.

1912: Boundary minutes and county school records begin to include District #9 in their notes.

An October 2nd newspaper article chronicles graduation at the school, the students and their program. It also includes interesting descriptions of the building. Throughout its history, students, teachers, and historians have noted the beauty of the surroundings of Sylvandale School, the school in the trees. "District No. 9 has attained an enviable reputation for the beauty of the grounds surrounding the school building. These are neatly laid out and ornamented with trees, shrubs and flowers, while a gravity water system has been installed and aids materially in improving the sanitary condition of the premises. The district has recently installed some new playground apparatus, the expense being met by an entertainment given by the young people of the Blind Slough. The apparatus includes a horizontal bar, hurdle and teeter. Additional apparatus will probably be secured before the opening of the next term."

1917: House built nearby, just down the hill, by Norwegian immigrant Sigurd Petersen. Provides board for teacher in 1930s. My grandparents bought this house in 1927 and it is still in our family today.

1929: District #23 (Upper Blind Slough) consolidates with District #9 Lower Blind Slough School.

After 1928: Chimney moved to the east side of the building. Photos from 1927 show the chimney still in its original north side location. Bob Blair, graduating in 1928, remembers an above floor stove and original chimney placement. Frank Frost, a student in 1932, remembers a furnace under the school. The chimney was probably moved to the east side when the stove was taken out and the new furnace put in the basement.

1935: Vote to consolidate with Knappa School. Majority of Knappa families vote for it, majority of Sylvandale families vote against. Consolidation is put off.

1933–1936: Teacher boards with neighbors, the Ojas, my grandparents.

1939: Consolidated with Knappa School, District #4. Farewell picnic for last class. School purchased for $150 by Rev. John Hayes and the church mission.

1940: Church was officially chartered with the Assemblies of God as Sylvandale Gospel Tabernacle. The preacher, wife and two children lived in the building as well as holding services there. Neighbors remember services that stirred parishioners so, they ran outdoors and reveled in the yard outside.

Additional living quarters were made with the addition of a south wing and east wing and upstairs bedrooms. Later a narrow, turning staircase was added, and two upstairs bedrooms were shoehorned under the attic. At that time windows were changed. The design of the wallpaper and linoleum upstairs are consistent with this era. A circa 1948–49 photo shows the shingled hipped roof living room addition, which included the hallway with a toilet and staircase was in place before the window change and the upstairs addition. The downstairs additions were also more finished. The kitchen is consistent with that era and chrome deco-style towel rack. The upstairs bedrooms were wedged into the attic and the wood casement windows put in upstairs and above the kitchen. The partition on the main floor was added to stabilize the upstairs walls and block off the kitchen. A wood stove for cooking was piped into the chimney now on the east side.

The north side additions may have been added at the time as well. It has the same siding, and a different roof. This would have added the stage on the north side, a more logical addition for the church than for the private residence

it became later.

1947–1989: Purchased and lived in by local fisherman Jaffet Nousson. Aluminum sliding windows inserted during this period.

1989: Purchased by current owner, Alice Oja Nielsen.

The Sylvandale School is an excellent example of a Clatsop County rural schoolhouse from the turn of the century. It is one of the few, if not only, of its kind in the county and the state. A new roof, gutter system and paint job are minimum requirements for its continued preservation. It tells a story of its time and place and is worthy of preservation. I hope to do what I can to preserve and hopefully restore this historic building. ⚜

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Interviews and personal photographs from Owen Oja, Snookie Barendse, Alice Nielsen, Robert Blair, Ruby Smith, Jon Westerholm.

Definitions

Apron is the vertical running board that runs in a vertical direction under the window sill.

Balloon framing is a method of wood construction that utilizes long continuous framing members (studs) that run from sill plate to eve line with intermediate floor structures nailed to them,[8] with the heights of window sills, headers and next floor height marked out on the studs with a storey pole. Once popular when long lumber was plentiful, balloon framing has been largely replaced by platform framing.

Board and batten a form of wood siding for exterior walls, consisting of long vertical boards and thin strips, or battens, which extend over adjacent boards or joints (the spaces between adjacent surfaces).

Cornice is horizontal molded projection that completes a building or wall; or the upper slanting part of an entablature. The term cornice comes from Italian cornice, meaning "ledge."

Coved ceiling is rounded at the corners.

Ear is a projection at the corner of the top of a door or window.

Eve return: a roof edge that makes an acute inward turn for a short distance on the gable end of a building.

Four-over- four windows refers to four window panes in a frame over four more below in another frame.

Gable is the generally triangular portion of a wall between the edges of a sloping roof.

Hip roof, or hipped roof, is a type of roof where all sides slope downwards to the walls, usually with a fairly gentle slope. Thus it is a house with no gables or other vertical sides to the roof.

Knee brace A brace between a post and beam, the bottom chord of a roof truss and the support, or a stiffener in a portal frame.

Lunette is half-moon shaped space.

Pediment is a classical architectural element consisting of the triangular section found above the horizontal structure (entablature), typically supported by columns.

Vestibule is an entrance hall.